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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of a job-related approach to language learning on a fossilized learner of English as a second language. The subject was a bilingual female nurse with 20 years' residence in the United States. Her oral and written output was thoroughly analyzed and her social and linguistic needs for interacting with patients and caretakers at the hospital were assessed. Based on this information, an instructional program in English focusing on specific job-related communication was developed. Results indicate that the job-related approach yielded greater interlanguage destabilization and growth toward a more American norm of English. Confounding factors found include existence of competing target languages in the work place and neighborhood, including Black English, Puerto Rican English, Philadelphia English, and standard English. (MSE)

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Impact of Job-Related Instruction on Language Use: The Case of A Long-Term Resident Second Language Learner.

The present study investigates the teaching/learning process of a "fossilized" second language learner from two perspectives: (1) Using conventional ESL techniques in attempting to destabilize the subject's interlanguage toward a more target-like variety of English; and, (2) focusing on communicative and grammatically explicit instruction based on a subsequent needs assessment of the subject's language use in the work place.

Our subject is a bilingual female who has lived in an urban setting in the U.S. for over twenty years. She works in the Pediatrics section of an urban hospital in Philadelphia's center city area. A thorough analysis of the subject's oral and written output was carried out. Based on a systematic study of her social and linguistic needs for interacting with patients and caretakers in the hospital environment, we developed a job-related instructional program.

The results of the study show that the job-related instructional approach yielded greater interlanguage destabilization and growth toward a more target-like "American" English norm. Confounding factors included the existence of competing target languages in the work place and neighborhood: Black English, Puerto Rican English, Philadelphia English, and standard English.

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THE IMPACT OF JOB-RELATED INSTRUCTION ON LANGUAGE USE: THE CASE OF A LONG-TERM RESIDENT SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

The literature on language for Specific Purposes (LSP) has not addressed the needs of long-term resident second language learners, who are often described as "fossilized." These learners are frequently referred to Colleges or English Language Centers for the specific purpose of improving their English language skills in order to obtain a promotion or arrange for a change in job assignments. As Selinker (1986, 1987) clearly states, many scholars working in Interlanguage (IL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies have not paid attention to the advances made by their colleagues working in the field of LSP. This is clearly an unfortunate situation since much descriptive work has been done on scientific, technical, and occupational contexts by professionals from a variety of perspectives, such as ethnomethodology, the sociology of science, research communication studies, etc. The importance of making connections between scholars researching phenomena in IL and SLA, and those working with implementing strategies of communication in LSP will, in the long run, benefit those of us working directly with large numbers of long-term resident second language learners in major urban areas of the English-speaking world.

The present study investigates two main problems in the teaching/learning process of an apparently "fossilized" second language learner working in a hospital setting. By fossilized I mean a person whose learning process appears to have reached an impasse. The problems to be investigated are (1) the extent to which it is possible for the language specialist to manipulate

the "unique" rules believed to be present in the IL of second language learners, as proposed by Ellis (1984); and (2) the delivery of instructional services and elaboration of domain-specific (i.e., work-related) teaching strategies for meeting the demands of target language use in a work setting. The subject of the study is a 44-year-old Hispanic female, whom we shall call Charo, who has been living in the continental U.S. for the past 26 years. She is presently employed in the Pediatrics section of a large urban hospital located in Philadelphia's downtown area. Charo, has been a bilingual nurse's assistant for the past 19 years. Recently, she was told by her supervisor that her English language skills were not deemed satisfactory. Insinuations were made concerning future staff cutbacks. Charo agreed to enroll in a two-year Social Welfare/Mental health program at the local Community College in order to upgrade her written and oral skills, and obtain an associate degree. The supervisor has strongly recommended that she improve her writing skills, since the written reports that she is occasionally asked to prepare when translating confidential information for Spanish-speaking patients show that she has yet to internalize the rules for standard English usage. Furthering her education will also allow Charo the opportunity to acquire the necessary credentials in order to retain her position. In addition, advancement and changes in job assignments will be contingent upon her becoming credentialed. So motivation to learn standard English is there.

A preliminary needs assessment carried out in January 1986 indicated that Charo's duties included primarily registering

patients, translating from Spanish into English, and explaining to doctors and nurses the cultural conflicts that exist in the home environment of many adults and children who are referred to the hospital by caseworkers or family members. Additional duties performed by our subject are taking down vital information using pre-printed lab forms, answering phones, and following doctors' instructions. Charo relies primarily on verbal orders in carrying out her duties. Although she is expected to prepare short reports describing symptoms of ailments affecting Spanish-speaking patients, Charo's writing skills are seldom reinforced at work. In other words, neither her supervisor nor her co-workers take the time to provide corrective feedback with respect to the non-target-like features present in her IL.

We administered several placement tests to Charo in order to determine her present level of English language proficiency. These included a combination of in-house and commercially available tests that have been field tested on the College's ESL student population, but are not domain specific and barely tap into the subject's multiple competences as proposed by Selinker (1986). Her scores in Reading Comprehension (SLEP, Part II) were sufficiently high to allow her to take the introductory college-level courses in Social Welfare/Mental Health. Her Spanish reading comprehension scores (Inter-American Level 5) were also slightly above the cut-off established for taking college-level courses in Spanish. In contrast, her writing skills in English revealed a high degree of variability in the use of several linguistic forms, which she employs over time in both appropriate and inappropriate contexts.

Based on Charo's explicit request that we assist her in improving her grammatical and oral skills in English, the following instructional format was set up: (1) First, explicit grammatical instruction was provided for one hour, stressing subject/verb agreement exercises; recognition of phrases, infinitives adverbs and adjectives; and the use of verb tenses. (2) An additional instructional strategy focused on the writing and rewriting processes. Time limits were set for writing exercises performed in the Learning Lab (usually 45 minutes). The rewriting or reformulation exercises were done in subsequent sessions. Charo was also given take-home writing assignments on specific topics taken from texts on mental health, nursing, and social welfare. (3) A third approach placed emphasis on dictation of short reading passages in order to underscore the pronunciation/orthography relationship, and highlight the various vowel distinctions made in English. Audiotaping and transcribing pronunciation exercises that explicitly stressed final consonant clusters, i.e., /nd nts/ and /kt ks/, which were rendered as [n n(s)], and [k], respectively, by Charo, were also included. The first three instructional approaches were followed for a period of 10 months. (4) Following a second visit to the place of employment, the actual LSP work context, a fourth instructional component was devised which stressed job-specific written and communicative tasks, and role-playing sessions which focused on the language Charo actually used in her mental health/social work practicum, and in the hospital setting.

An experienced tutor, who was a retired school teacher with training in linguistics and ESL, worked with Charo twice a week

for four hours. The tutor worked closely with this researcher in the development of LSP teaching materials, and in monitoring Charo's IL development. Charo came to her tutoring sessions straight from work. She was also taking two college-level mental health courses, and working 20 hours on her practicum.

Since both the job and school situations demanded grammatical accuracy, Charo's written and oral output was analyzed with an emphasis on grammatical development over time. Written and oral data were collected over a period of 23 months. For purposes of analysis, the data were divided into three time periods: Time I (pre-test writing sample, February, March, April and May writings); Time II (June, July, September, October, and November writings (1986)); and Time III (January through December 1987 writings). Thus a total of 32 written samples plus the initial needs assessment interview were analyzed. During each of the time periods identified above, Charo's verb phrases were analyzed for marking of number, negation, and tense.[1]

Our analysis shows that Charo has the concept of marking singular and plural in the verb phrase with present tense BE, in all time periods. She consistently uses "is" and "are" with the appropriate noun phrases. The variability encountered through time involves presentational sentences that use "there" + a form of BE in standard English. (Please refer to Figure I, top section.)

In Charo's sentences, there is typically an element at the beginning of the sentence before the verb (e.g., a prepositional phrase or an adverb) that apparently makes it harder for her to

[1]My colleague Barbara Hoekje helped analyze the linguistic data.

see that the subject is missing. In other words, something else is in its place and she consistently uses a plural verb with certain singular noun phrases. In sentences with predicate nominatives, she sometimes makes the verb agree with the predicate nominative (PN).

Throughout the three time periods, a pattern of systematic variability is observed in Charo's IL with respect to the use of HAVE/HAS. As a general rule, she uses HAVE/HAS in affirmative sentences with singular Noun Phrase (NP) subjects 50 percent of the time (i.e., in five out of ten sentences). When using HAVE/HAS as modal (or periphrastic), Charo's written and oral output systematically shows that she has yet to approximate target-like usage. As we shall see later on, notwithstanding explicit grammatical and domain-specific instruction where these forms occur, this usage persists.

Careful inspection of Figure I shows variability in Charo's use of modal HAS/HAVE in the first person singular and first person plural. The pattern that emerges differs from standard English. At Time III, a "backsliding process" (i.e., returning to a previous state of IL development, characterized by the use of non-target-like constructions) is in evidence with respect to the use of modal HAS/HAVE in the first person plural (refer to Figure I). Use of modal HAS/HAVE in third person plural is in the direction of SE.

In contrast to the uses of modal HAS, usage of main verb or lexical HAS/HAVE, in Charo's IL constructions shows change over time. From the outset, Charo's utterances were characterized by a systematic target-like use of lexical HAVE in

first person singular and in first person plural. Though variability is present, this pattern persists throughout all time periods. At times she seemed to "backslide," producing non-target like constructions which had been initially present at Time I. This may constitute an integral feature of her IL or be part of the IL modification process suggested by Ellis (1985a). We need to develop procedures in LSP/IL research to be sure.

Her use of lexical HAS/HAVE in the third person singular exhibited a high degree of variability through time. Charo has reached target-like performance with respect to the use of lexical HAVE in the third person plural.

It is difficult to explain the variability in Charo's use of the third person "-s"; its usage is variable, which means that she senses final /s/ ("-s") should be there for regular verbs, but does not always put it there. Perhaps she has "frozen" at an early stage of second language development since there is a relatively low frequency with which these verbs occur in her IL (i.e., in both her oral and written output). The stem form seems sufficient in the majority of cases.

In the samples analyzed for the three time periods, her basic method of negating is DON'T + STEM; she uses "don't + stem" as her means of negating seven out of 11 times that she negates sentences. She also uses inflected forms ("doesn't" rendered as "dosn't") but in a non-target-like manner, demonstrating that she is somehow aware that she should be inflecting the verb in some way, but does not yet control the target-like patterns of inflection in negative structures.

In comparison to the overall pattern of the inflections of BE present in Charo's IL, it seems evident that her use of "Have + negation" shows much less control. One explanation could be that she has overlearned the inflections of BE relative to the rest of her English competence, or has "frozen" at some level of cognitive awareness on negation and the other irregular inflections such as HAVE. Another plausible explanation for her non-target-like use of "doesn't" and "has" is that these could be instances of hypercorrection, in that they represent developmentally advanced forms of which Charo is aware, but she has yet to master the rules for their appropriate distribution. Some of these non-target-like constructions could also be the result of the non-standard language varieties to which she is exposed. We will elaborate on this later on.

Since these are definitely more marked forms, these deviations from target-like usage would not be easily explained as "spontaneous" acquisition errors. We were hoping that the acquisition of rules for the distribution of target-like forms in appropriate contexts would be accomplished in an instructional program that focused on achieving target-like use in job-related or context-specific situations.

Looking at her tense usage in the writing samples examined over time periods I, II, and II, we find that there are 76 clauses that are judged as being clear past tense contexts in which a past form of the verb was needed (refer to excerpts in Figure 2). An inspection of her verb usage over time shows that she marks past tense with irregular verbs much more frequently than with regular verbs. This is in keeping with the results of

previous studies in Second Language Acquisition (as reviewed in Krashen, 1982). Results of previous studies, as reported on by Wolfram (1985), suggest that tense marking is favored with irregular verb forms in the earlier stages of second language learning, although he cautions that tense marking is a highly variable phenomenon, and that there are a number of surface constraints that may systematically affect this variability. We may thus speculate that Charo's IL has become "frozen" at an early stage of second language development.

The possible intersection of the phonological process with the grammatical process in accounting for surface unmarking in Charo's IL was also investigated. It was hypothesized that the past tense morpheme was influenced by the succeeding phonetic environment, but we did not find any evidence of phonetic conditioning of past tense usage. The main factor conditioning the presence of the past tense appears to be whether or not the verb is one of the set of irregular verbs for which she knows the lexical past tense form. One may speculate that for her, these lexical forms represent semantic memories relating to the affective domain (family/home environment) which, as elaborated on by Hamilton (1983), are easily accessible as semantic schemata when she is faced with the challenge of performing a meaningful task, such as writing a composition on a familiar topic.

In her use of the present perfect, she uses the forms BEEN and BEING in an expected present perfect context. It appears that she is not explicitly aware of the actual target form HAVE/HAS BEEN. Her consistency in using the non-target like form

BEEN seems to derive from exposure to spoken non-standard Philadelphia English. In her case, reinforcement of the non-target-like usage comes from daily verbal exchanges with her neighbors (primarily blacks and Hispanics), and from face-to-face interaction with low-income black, white, and Hispanic patients at her place of employment. The existence of these conditions has been verified by site visits to her work place and neighborhood.

DISCUSSION

The data we have to date show that by Time III, following a period of domain-specific or job-related instruction, there has been limited development in most areas over time. This may be due to the input available to Charo in most discourse domains, i.e., home, neighborhood, and work. In addition, the presence of competing target languages, i.e., black English, standard English, Philadelphia English, and Puerto Rican English may have an effect on Charo's IL development. As far as I have been able to establish, Charo uses her IL in three principal domains: the home/family environment, where code-switching constitutes a regular feature of daily interaction; the hospital setting (or work place); and the racially mixed neighborhood. Charo reports that she code-switches about 25 percent of the time when interacting with her three children, who are primarily English dominant. Spanish is used at all times with her husband. In dealing with her neighbors, she uses varieties of both standard languages: Puerto Rican Spanish and non-standard Philadelphia English. Her phonology displays features of the TL norms to which she is exposed.

As mentioned at the beginning, the verbal input available to Charo at her place of employment is also limited in terms of exposure to standard English grammatical features. This became evident while visiting the hospital in order to gather additional data in August 1987. Doctors and nurses often rely on her to interpret for them when treating Spanish-speaking patients. But she has little ongoing interaction with them, and they seldom correct her IL non-target-like utterances.

It is important to point out that our data show that she has a growing tendency toward overinflection of certain forms (e.g., "has" and "doesn't") which may be related to the availability of these features in the input made available to her by the tutor. It is indeed the case in our data that HAS and DOESN'T are emphasized in the rewriting process by the tutor.

In terms of dealing with the problem of the extent to which it is possible for the language specialist to manipulate the "unique" rules present in the IL of a second-language learner, it is clear from our data that, to date, we have barely begun to scratch the surface. Charo, as well as many other apparently "fossilized" learners, needs considerably more time and exposure to individualized and small-group instructional programs where standard English is made available. We also need to experiment with a variety of teaching materials that are job-related, and that stress the use of communicative exercises, which call for functional uses of language in context-specific situations, as proposed by Widdowson (1981).

Given the fact that Charo's situation is representative of a

large number of our students, we look forward to preparing additional Language Specific materials to be used in conjuction with several of the instructional strategies described above. Attempting to destabilize the unique rules and features of an apparently "fossilized" learner's IL presents a tremendous challenge for dedicated ESL and LSP professionals.

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FIGURE 1

CHARO'S INTERLANGUAGE FEATURES

Number of writing samples analyzed= 32 (1986-1987);
Data transcribed (spoken data)= total of three (3) hours.

The data were divided into three time periods: Time I (pre-test writing sample, February, March, April and May writings); Time II (June, July, September, October, and November 1986 writings); and Time III (January through December 1987 writings).

Use of BE

Variability encountered in presentational sentences that use "there" + a form of Be in Standard English: e.g.,

→ Time I (a) "In my neighborhood, _____ are a lot of kids that don't have facilities for anything."

→ Time II (b) "Otherwise _____ will be a problem."

→ Time III (c) "But at the same time, you have limitation[0] because_____so much you can do for your clients."

Use of Lexical Item "Still"

Most of the time, Charo treats the lexical item "still" as though it were a verb:, e.g.,

→ Time I (d) "At times I-I still willing to go if they let me."

→ Time II (e) "Carmen still in college."

→ Time III (f) "I still in clinic. My headache still the same."

Modal (Periphrastic) HAS

Initially, C exhibits a great deal of variability in the use of modal "has". By Time III, however, the use of modal "has" in first person singular and third person plural seems to have become stabilized. In first person singular and first person plural, C's usage differs from standard English (SE), e.g.,

First Person Singular:

→ Time I (g) "I has to go back to school."
(1/3; 33% correct)

→ Time II (h) "I don't has to walk to much at the mall because the stores are together, one after the others, including drug store."

there is variability, e.g.,

(i) "I have to help my husband."

(2/3 or 66% correct)

→ Time III (j) "I has to think twice because I'm going to mi::--I will be mi:: up."
(1/7 or 14% correct)

Lexical (Main verb) HAS

Change is exhibited in C's IL through time with respect to the use of lexical "has."

First Person Singular:

→ Time I (w) "Because I have my family. I have three kids."

Variability is present, e.g.,

(x) "I has a bad experience that never happend to our family before."

(In 6 out of 8 cases, C's usage of 1st person singular lexical has/have is correct; 75% correct)

→ Time II (y) "I have the experience to see many decrease."
(3/5 or 60% correct)

First Person Plural:

→ Time I (k) "But we has to do everything at the clinic."

variability is present, e.g.,

(l) "Here we have to live with doors closed."

(1/2 or 50% correct)

→ Time II (m) "We have to dealing with it."

→ but "backsliding" occurs, e.g.,

(n) "I told her maybe we has to let them go."

(1/3 or 33% correct usage)

→ Time III (o) "For us we has to call them residents."

(1/3 or 33% correct)

Third Person Singular:

→ Time I (p) "She has to work until that time."

(2/4 or 50% correct)

→ Time II (q) "Because my oldes son have to bring me at work every day."

(0/1 or 0% correct)

→ Time III (r) "Somebody has to work on weekends."

(s) "(It) has to do with the brain. . ."

(2/2 or 100% correct)

Third Person Plural:

→ Time I (t) "Many handicaps have to stay home with the parents..."

(2/2 or 100% correct)

→ Time II (u) "They have to make a living and studied."

(1/1 or 100% correct)

→ Time III (v) "They have to be a correct spelling for the doctors."

(1/1 or 100% correct usage)

→ Time III

(z) "I'm student almost in my middle age and now is when I have a little time to returned to college."

(7/8 or 87.5% correct)

First Person Plural:

→ Time I (aa) "We have between fifty and sixty patients."

(4/4 or 100% correct)

→ Time II (bb) "At the same time if we have a few students, we talk, asked questions one student to another."

→ Occasionally, C "backslides," e.g.,

(cc) "In my house, my husband and I has worked all our live."

(5/6 or 83% correct)

→ Time III (dd) "Since we have different culture, many culture being abuse."

(1/2 or 50% correct)

Third Person Singular:

→ Time I (ee) "He have the Masters degree in Political Science."

Variability occurs, e.g.,

(ff)"To add to his confusion he has a girl-friend beside the wife and exwife."
(7/10 or 70% correct)

→ Time II (gg)"Benny is married and have a boy 2 yrs old."
(3/9 or 33% correct)

→ Time III (hh)"She have a nice character."

(0/2 or 0% correct)

Third Person Plural:

→ Time I (ii)"They have almost the same education."
(8/9 or 89% correct)

→ Time II (jj)"Thursday Dutch people have differ-ent cain of food. . ."

(7/8 or 87.5% correct)

→ Time III (kk)"These words have the meaning of the body."

(8/8 or 100% correct usage)

FIGURE 2

EXCERPTS

(Time alloted for writing exercises: 45 minutes during tutoring session.)

TIME I (4/15/86)

"I have been worked at H_____ Hospital for nighteen years. I had being harrasment by the head of the clinic. She say to me that they had to cut the staff. She say to me that they need a new people who now how to do everything."

TIME II (9/29/86)

"I use question to probe and challenge him. Example of this was, who is the woman you really like or love. His answer was, He was confuse, because no only that, he has a girlfriend beside the exwife and wife. Also I asked do you have any physical problems, Answer was no, but I was alcoholic."

TIME III (12/3/87)

"I went to work early this morning. When I went into the hospital the first face I saw was my supervisor. I said to her Good morning, How are you doing today. She don't even look at me, and respond I came early today and I have to finish you work. I ask her what work? She respond, the charts that you left yesterday. I repply I'm sorry but I did finish my charts and I record all my work, you know that you never finish yours. I was the one whom finish most of you records . . ."